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Testimonial for Coaching

Hello, I'm David Walker, Medical Center Director of the GV(Sonny)Montgomery VA in Jackson, Mississippi. One of the most important decisions I made when I became Director was to begin participation in coaching. Jackson's situation is not unique, but it has significant challenges. One of which is being one of 15 facilities on the current High Risk List due to our performance on SAIL.

So where to start? This facility had a long history of senior leadership leading by rank thus pushing the facility into the bottom 10% on the AES.

We also had multiple service chief vacancies and pentad vacancies. So where are we now? In the last 24 months we have filled 12 service chief positions and three pentad positions. For the last two years we have been one of the top 10 most improved facilities on the AES. And the most recent data from SAIL and IPEC show that the systems now in place are producing significant change.

How has coaching helped us? I have two coaches, one from VA and one from VHA. My VHA coach is a SME in healthcare. My VA coach is Birgit Hansen. I chose her because I recognized needing help with "who will do what by when." She has taught me how to have those conversations with my direct reports, and also to help me help them have those conversations with their reports. This may sound simple, but let me give an example. I recruited an HRO who made impressive changes with data to prove it in just one year, but he wanted to move close to water. He even was given offers from two VAMCs, one in our VISN and the other in Florida.

When he went to tell me his decision to leave it was obvious that he didn't want to go and he didn't know why. I shared my perception with him that it was the way I treated him, coached him, that was making his decision difficult. With the help of my boss we created a combined HRO over our facility and the one on the coast for him to consider. He turned down the position in Florida and is now over two medical centers as the HRO. And this occurred before the soon to be implemented changes in HRO reporting.

In addition, Birgit has come onsite for three sessions to work with different areas. In conclusion, my professional development is critical for the success of this institution and I know that I must continue to push myself to grow by using a coach.